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		their State level organizations. In the Conference of Udaipur, subject of greater and more substantive empowerment of women representatives was discussed and a charter of demand was finalized which is slated to be discussed and disseminated in divisional level meetings of Elected Women Representatives of Panchayats.

In addition to the above, several other meetings and workshops were organized on the issues ranging from promotion of bio-fuels, implementation of Jan Kerosene Pariyojana, setting up of Rural Business Hubs, etc.. Particular mention needs must be made of the National Presentation on Rural Business Hubs (RBH) in November 2004 to which nearly a thousand Panchayati Raj representatives were invited from all over the country and to which, as per the records of the Confederation of Indian Industry, approximately 250 representatives of business houses also attended.

The expenditure under the Head "Conferences, Seminars and Workshops, etc." from the creation of this Ministry on 27th May, 2004 has been as follows:

Year 2004-2005 — Rs. 96 Lakhs

Year 2005-2006 — Rs. 135.72 Lakhs

It may please be noted that host State Governments and (in the case of RBH) the Confederation of Indian Industry have substantially contributed to the organization of these meetings.

Gram Sabhas

3557. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to recommend to the State Government any changes in the matter of holdings Gram Sabhas;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether any study with respect to the functioning of Gram Sabhas in the country has been made after new regime of panchayat system become operational after 73rd Constitutional amendment?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Article 243-A of the Constitution provides for the establishment of Gram Sabhas to "exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law provide". During the Round Table Meeting of the State Ministers of Panchayati Raj held in Kolkata in July 2004, it was decided that State Governments may review the extant legislation to determine the legislative and other steps needed to be taken to ensure that the powers and functions mentioned in Article 243 A are adequately incorporated in the State legislation. These include constitution of Sabhas below the Gram level such as Gram Sansad or Ward Sabha, periodicity of meetings of Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas and empowering the Gram Sabha with measures such as right to all information required to make the Panchayats truly answerable to the Gram Sabha, approval of plans prepared by the Gram Panchayat, issue of utilization certificates of funds allocated for the plans, programmes of the Panchayat and identification of beneficiaries. Though no nation-wide study has been undertaken, there are reports of low attendance in Gram Sabhas and infrequency of meetings.

An Expert Group constituted by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on planning at the grass roots level has submitted its report in March 2006 which has been accepted by the Ministry. Some of the recommendations of the Group relate to participative planning at the Gram Panchayat level and it has been suggested in this context that certain steps should be carried out on a campaign mode to ensure good participation in Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas. These include advance notice of meetings, mobilization of special interest groups such as self-help groups for attending the Word and Gram Sabhas, campaigns through National Survey Scheme and Nehru Yuvak kendra Volunteers, nomination of facilitators for each Ward Sabha and having a proper structure for the Gram and Ward Sabha and having a proper structure for the Gram and Ward Sabha with scope to break up into smaller groups for discussion.